

W. W. Dwight's Jewelry Store (American Legion Building)
Elm Street
Niobrara
Knox County
Nebraska

HABS No. NE-24

HABS,
NEB,
54-NIOB,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NE-24

W. W. DWIGHT'S JEWELRY STORE (American Legion Building)

Location: North side of Elm Street, 75' east of intersection with 7th Avenue, Niobrara, Knox County, Nebraska.

USGS Niobrara Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 14.579330.4733820.

Present Owner: United States of America (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District).

Present Use: Vacant, scheduled to be demolished. (Moved to the third townsite of Niobrara after this documentation was written in 1977).

Significance: The building was built in 1902 to serve both commercial and residential use. It functioned as such under various ownerships until it was sold in 1939 to the American Legion, Frank Griener Post No. 224, the most recent occupants. Its simple false-front wooden frame style with large display windows is representative of many early commercial structures built in Niobrara, as well as other pioneer towns, during their early stages of development.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1902.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building stands on lot 5, block 7 of Starr's Addition, which included other lots numbered 4 and 6. These lots were among the lands platted for a second town of Niobrara after the devastating flood of 1881.

In 1902, W. W. Dwight purchased the east half of lot 5 from the Bayha Brothers (George G. and Benjamin D.) for \$150 and immediately began construction of this wooden-frame false-front structure. The building served as a jewelry store and a residence for Mr. Dwight.

In 1909, Dwight's jewelry business was taken over by George N. Brown. An article in the Niobrara Tribune, May 13, 1909, suggests Mr. Brown remained in this building although title had been deeded to Charles Nelson by Mr. Dwight on April 26, 1909. A later newspaper article (July 7, 1910)

mentions Mr. Brown moving his jewelry store into the Wellman Building across the street from where the Tribune Building stood. Sometime after Mr. Brown vacated the premises, Charles Nelson as owner, moved into the store, operating the front room as an office and using the rear rooms as his residence. Mr. Nelson died April 25, 1938 and in the settlement of his estate, the property was sold to the American Legion Frank Griener Post No. 224 in 1939. The American Legion retained this property as their lodge until its sale to the U.S. Government on June 13, 1975. Later the building was moved to the new third townsite of Niobrara in the late 1970s.

The list of original and subsequent owners of the east side of lot 5, Starr's Addition to West Niobrara from the Register of Deeds, Center, Knox County, Nebraska, are as follows:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1889 | Deed July 19, 1889, recorded August 1, 1889, Book K Page 173, James Starr, original owner to Allen Bloomfield |
| 1902 | Deed February 24, 1902, recorded March 10, 1902, Book 27 Page 500, Allen Bloomfield to George G. and Benjamin D. Bayha. For consideration of \$2,700 for lots 4, 5, 6.. |
| 1902 | Deed October 6, 1902, recorded October 17, 1902, Book 28 Page 302, George G. and Benjamin D. Bayha to W. W. Dwight. For consideration of \$150 for the east side of lot 5 |
| 1908 | Mortgage June 9, 1908, recorded June 9, 1908, Book 21 Page 225, W. W. Dwight to Nebraska Central Building and Loan Association. For consideration of \$400. (Release April 29, 1909, recorded April 25, 1913, Book 27, Page 590) |
| 1908 | Mortgage October 24, 1908, recorded October 28, 1908, Book 17 Page 372, W. W. Dwight to Charles Nelson. For consideration of \$160 plus 10% interest. (Release May 5, 1915, recorded May 7, 1915, Book 31, Page 387) |
| 1909 | Deed April 26, 1909, recorded April 27, 1909, Book 39 Page 350, W. W. Dwight to Charles Nelson. For consideration of \$700 for lot 5 |

- 1938 Estate April 25, 1938, recorded December 17, 1940, Book 4 Page 180, Charles Nelson died 1938
- 1939 Deed November 22, 1939, recorded November 27, 1939, Book 67 Page 30, Neils Nielsen, et al to American Legion. Quit Claims Deed, Settlement of Last Will and Testament of Charles Nelson
- 1975 Deed June 13, 1975, recorded June 13, 1975, Book 97 Page 303, American Legion to United States of America (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown.
5. Original plan and construction: None known.
6. Alterations and additions: No known alterations.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

W. W. Dwight opened his jewelry store in late 1902 advertising such items as "stationery, pens, fine silverware and specializing in watch repairing and cleaning." Publicity items such as "Bean Jar Guessing Contests," were often seen in weekly Tribune advertisements.

George Brown continued to operate the jewelry store in 1909 and moved into the building sometime later, using the building as his office and residence. He was associated with the State Bank of Niobrara, said to have supplied the initial money to start the bank in 1913. He reportedly maintained his office for the bank in this building. Mr. Nelson owned a great deal of property in the area and is said to have made most of his money through securities investment in Chicago.

The American Legion Frank Griener Post No. 224 was organized to serve as a lodge for the ex-servicemen in the Niobrara area in 1920. The lodge bought the building in 1939 and had maintained the building until its sale to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1975.

C. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books, Register of Deeds, Center, Knox County, Nebraska.

Interviews:

Mr. and Mrs. Harley Eberly, August 15, 1977, longtime residents of Niobrara, friend of Charles Nelson.

Mrs. Marguarite Jensen, July 29, 1977, clerk of Knox County Courthouse, remembered Charles Nelson living in the building in the 1920s, mentioned his association with the State Bank.

Leonard Kocina, Creighton, Nebraska, July 29, 1977, former resident of Niobrara, remembered Charles Nelson living in the building, owned a great deal of property around Niobrara.

Mrs. Marie Schwach, Niobrara, Nebraska, July 1977, remembered building as a jewelry store, possibly a woodworking shop at one point. Mr. Nelson's association with the State Bank of Niobrara.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Niobrara Bicentennial Committee. Niobrara Centennial 1856-1956 (updated 1976). Niobrara, Nebraska: Verdigre Eagle Press, 1976.

Niobrara Tribune. Newspaper articles, October 24, 1902 April 15, 1904, May 13, 1909, July 7, 1910, April 1, 1920.

Prepared by: Kathryn Burns
Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
Summer 1977

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The American Legion Building is a three room, one-story frame structure with a false front on the south facade hiding the gable roof line. The bracketed cornice, painted window signs and its pleasing proportions all contribute to the architectural distinction of the building. The building, constructed in 1902, stands as an excellent example of the pioneer commercial architecture of the Niobrara community during a prime period in its commercial development.

2. Condition of fabric: The over-all condition of the building ranges from good to excellent. The rear shed is in very poor condition.
3. Description of Exterior:
 1. Over-all dimensions: The building, rectangular in shape, measures 20' -3" (three bays) x 30' -4" with a 6' x 10' lean-to shed at the rear. It is a one story structure.
 2. Foundations: The front of the building sits on poured-in-place concrete footings. The remainder (rear) sits on field stone with mortar joists.
 3. Wall construction, finish and color: The building is clad in white painted clapboards. The front facade has novelty siding. All other elevations have standard clapboard siding. Below each front display window is a rectangular wooden panel.
 4. Structural system, framing: The building has wood frame construction.
 5. Stoops: A concrete sidewalk runs in front of the structure with the central entrance approximately a foot above the sidewalk level. A concrete step is at the base of the rear door. Traces of canvas awning fittings remain on the store front.
 6. Chimneys: One square brick chimney, new in appearance, emerges from the peak of the gable roof in the center of the building.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The double doors on the front elevation contain two (one-over-one) glass lights with small raised panels below. A modern wooden door on the east (rear) wall has two inset panels. Another rear door on the north elevation leads to the lean-to shed.
 - b. Windows: Each of the large front windows consists of six large rectangular panes of glass (three-over-three) on either side of the main entrance. A two-light transom, now painted white, appears above the double doors. A painted window sign is found on the lower center pane of the left display window reading "American Legion, Post #224". American Legion is above, painted on the exterior in silver letters with yellow used as a shading detail. Post #224 is painted below in narrower lettering and shaded in red. The right display window (lower center pane) has the painted word "American" in arched lettering. Two-over-two-light double-hung sash windows appear on the east and west elevations and the east side of the north elevation.

5. Decorative features and trim: Front display counters have heavy applied molding around the top with vertical beaded tongue-and-groove woodwork below. In the northeast corner of the west rear room is a wooden wash basin with cupboard below.
6. Hardware: A sturdy brass door handle with thumb depressor and plate is on the right front double door.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: A wood burning, potbellied stove sits in the front room. This stove was manufactured by the Mardwick Stove Company of Cleveland, Tennessee. A space heater in the northwest room was made by "Samco Oil Heat".
 - b. Lighting: The building has cord-suspended incandescent lighting system.
- D. Site: The building faces south on the north side of Elm Street, 75' east of the intersection of Seventh Avenue and Elm Street.

Prepared by: Perry Benson
Architect
Historic American Buildings Survey
Summer 1977

and

Kathryn Burns
Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
Summer 1977

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Niobrara project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in co-operation with the citizens of the Village of Niobrara. The project was funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District, in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the construction of the Gavins Point Dam and Lewis and Clark Lake. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, the project was completed in the HABS Field Office in Niobrara, Nebraska during the summer of 1977 by project supervisor Perry Benson (University of Pennsylvania), team foreman Larry Jones (Texas Tech University) and student architects Peter Darlow (McGill University), Lisa Becker (Notre Dame University) and Darl Rastorfer (University of Pennsylvania). The written historical and architectural data was prepared by Kathryn Burns, and edited by Susan McCown, a historian in the HABS office in August 1979. Two exterior photos were taken by Sam Amato in the fall of 1977.